

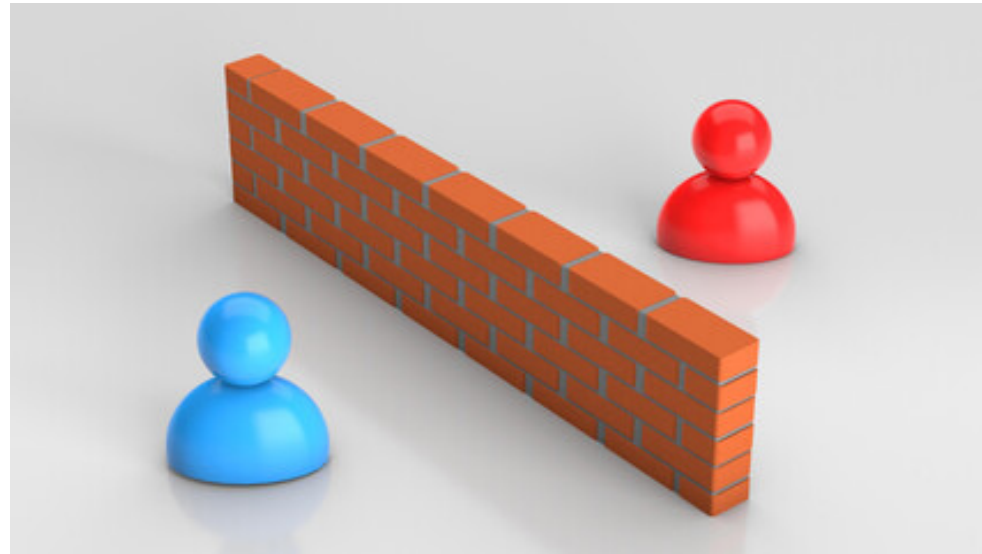
# CVs, applications, interviews for Postgraduate Study

Cancer Biology Summer School, Kampala 2025

Maïke de la Roche

# Accessing postgraduate study

Good  
students



Good  
supervisors

# Recruitment process

## Purpose is to ensure a great match

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Prepare for your  
application



Personal contact with a  
potential supervisor



Email potential supervisor



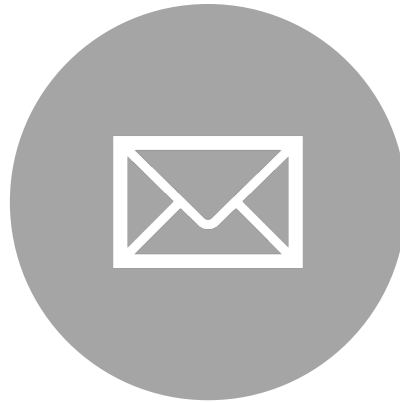
Respond to an  
advertisement

# Email potential supervisor

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SUPERVISOR VERY BUSY



EMAIL MUST BE SUCCINCT AND  
CATCH THEIR ATTENTION IN THE  
FIRST SENTENCE



ATTACH CV (1 – 2 PAGES) AND  
TRANSCRIPTS, IF POSSIBLE

Subject: Request for PhD study

Dear Professor Name

I am currently in my final year, studying Biochemistry at the University of WHERE\_EVER, and am studying the following courses – LIST COURSES. My supervisor, Dr AN\_OTHER, introduced me to your research on RESEARCH SUBJECT and I read the papers you published in JOURNAL with great interest. I would value the opportunity to discuss joining your research team as a PhD student.

My hope is that I can start PhD study in October 2024.

Please find my CV and transcripts attached.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A Student



# Your Bucket CV

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Create bucket CV

Infinite length

Not intended to be sent to anyone !

Update regularly with new training, new experiences, evidence of your achievements (prizes, awards etc)

Pick & mix from this to create targeted CV for each application

## Bucket CV

### Personal details

Name  
Contact details  
Nationality/work authorisation

### Education

| Date                                                                                                          | Course(s) | Institution |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| • Results                                                                                                     |           |             |
| • Other notable achievements                                                                                  |           |             |
| Tags – e.g. analysis, research, written communication, creativity, problem solving, working under pressure... |           |             |

### Work experience

| Date                                                                                                                                        | Job title | Employer/organisation |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| • Description of role                                                                                                                       |           |                       |
| • Specific achievements (with numbers to prove them)                                                                                        |           |                       |
| Tags – e.g. commercial awareness, customer service, negotiation, working with others, interpersonal skills, administration, organisation... |           |                       |

### Leadership / Positions of responsibility

| Date                                                                                                                     | Role | Organisation |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------|
| • Description                                                                                                            |      |              |
| Specific achievements (with numbers)                                                                                     |      |              |
| Tags – e.g. leadership, influence, persuasion, developing others, team building, motivating, troubleshooting, innovation |      |              |

Skills (You may well want more categories than those suggested below.)

IT  
Packages you can use, what for, etc.

### Social media

Specific skills, where and when you used them  
• Details of what you achieved using them

### Languages

Language, level of proficiency (e.g. qualification attained, 'fluent spoken and written')

### Extra-curricular activities

| Date                  | Activity | Organisation/location |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| • Details             |          |                       |
| • Evidence of success |          |                       |

There's no need to have separate sections for paid and unpaid work experience.

Keep updating your 'tags'. The more job descriptions you look at, the more you will start to notice patterns. But different companies will use different words to describe similar concepts, so you need to be adaptable in your vocabulary.

Even your extra-curricular activities (avoid the word 'hobbies') can be used to demonstrate success, e.g. 'captained team to first league win in six years' or 'won award for most improved player'.

Save time:

- Put together a bucket CV

Keeping a bucket CV is a simple tactic that will help you to hone your application skills and save you valuable time.

You can start putting one together right away and keep it updated on an ongoing basis.

# CVs – General Points

Factual summary of your achievements

Targeted for recipient (prioritise information)

Error-free (evidence of attention to detail)

Well-organized (easy to read quickly)

Personal profile? Prefer to see evidence of your achievements rather than your opinion of yourself





# CVs – Good Advice!

1 – 2 pages in length

Good layout and style

HEADINGS or **Headings**  
No full stops and avoid  
italics and underlining

Bullet points  
Use one style only

No need for complete  
sentences

Font - Arial, Calibri,  
Helvetica

Avoid serif fonts

Don't use smaller than  
10 point

Don't use columns and  
tables as distracting

Replicate order within  
sections chronology,  
dates, name of  
employer etc

Don't use 'Other' as a  
heading

Use space well  
Don't cramp text and  
have acres of white  
space at bottom of  
page

# A poorly laid out CV

Whole CV is in an old-fashioned serif font – look at the employer's website and use a similar font and style

Confusing for the selector – make it easy to know how to contact you

Make headings stand out more

Remove table as it is distracting. Put date, employer and job title in bold

**Curriculum Vitae**

**SNEHA SHEKHAR**

**Address in UK:** St John's College  
Cambridge  
CB2 1TP, UK  
**Address in India:** F-7, 34 Hallikhed,  
Nagankhera Road, Mumbai 412018  
**E-mail:** snehashekh@cam.ac.uk; ss12@cam.ac.uk  
**Skype id:** snehas1  
**Telephone :** +44 (0) 7584 123456 ; 0091(0) 20 9876543  
**Date of Birth:** June 30, 1975.  
**Nationality:** Indian  
**Sex:** Female

**Educational Qualifications:** Nearing completion of Ph.D. at Geography Department, University of Cambridge, UK.  
M.Phil. (Environment, Society & Development), 2009  
University of Cambridge, UK  
M.Sc. (Anthropology) 1995, University of Mumbai, India  
B.Sc. (Botany) 1993, University of Mumbai, India

**Additional Qualification:** Certificate Course in Environment Education.  
Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad, India.  
November 1995- July 1996

Certificate course in Environmental Management  
University of Warwick, UK.  
September – December 2001

**Work Experience:**

| Duration                      | Employer                                               | Position held                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| February - June 2008          | NASSCOM Foundation, India                              | Consultant for project                                                                                                             |
| January 2007 to January 2008  | Self-employed                                          | Consultant                                                                                                                         |
| September 2006- December 2006 | International Institute for Social Studies Trust       | Professional Fellow                                                                                                                |
| January 2006- August 2006     | CDVTLA International India                             | Consultant for project 'Developing incentive based mechanisms for watershed protection services and improved livelihoods in India' |
| May 2003- December 2005       | Consultancy work for University of Bath, UK (EU R8280) | Project co-ordinator for project "Incorporating stakeholder perceptions of participatory water management in India"                |

This CV includes a third page listing more publications, scholarships and presentations at conferences. The etiquette for CVs outside academia is maximum 2 pages, so any of these that have given you relevant skills will need to appear higher up.

Unnecessary

Unpack the relevant skills and achievements

Ragged tabulation

List relevant achievements with bullet points

# A much better CV layout

**SNEHA SHEKHAR**

St John's College, Cambridge, CB2 1TP  
ss12@cam.ac.uk +44 (0) 7584 123456

**EDUCATION/ENVIRONMENTAL QUALIFICATIONS**

**2010-2015: University of Cambridge:** Geography PhD – nearing completion

- Space here to unpack the skills the PhD has given her
- Space here to unpack how the subject of the PhD is relevant to what she is applying for

**2009-2010: University of Cambridge:** M.Phil. Environment, Society & Development

- Space here to unpack any relevant skills or topics e.g. writing or research skills

**2001: University of Warwick:** Certificate course in Environmental Management

- Space here to unpack any relevant skills or topics e.g. writing or research skills

**1995-1996: Centre for Environment Education, Ahmedabad, India:** Certificate Course in Environment Education.

- Space here to unpack any relevant skills or topics e.g. writing or research skills

**1994-1995: University of Mumbai, India:** M.Sc. Anthropology

- Space here to unpack any relevant skills or topics e.g. writing or research skills

**1990-1993: University of Mumbai, India:** M.Sc. Botany

- Space here to unpack any relevant skills or topics e.g. writing or research skills

**ENVIRONMENTAL WORK EXPERIENCE**

**Feb – Jun 2008: NASSCOM Foundation, India** in collaboration with NALSAR, Hyderabad, India: Consultant

- Undertook consultancy project "Strengthening environmental law capacity in SAARC region"
- Space here to give more evidence of relevant achievements

**Jan 2007 – Jan 2008: Self employed, Consultant**

- Space here to give evidence of relevant achievements

**Sep 2006 – Dec 2006: Institute for Social Studies Trust, India,** Professional Fellow

- Space here to give evidence of relevant achievements

**Jan 2006 – Aug 2006: CDVTLA International India:** Consultant

# CVs – applying for postgraduate study

- Personal details
  - Education
  - Research/laboratory experience
  - Publications
  - Awards/prizes
  - Funding obtained
  - Extra-curricular activities/ Transferable skills/
  - Personal interests
- 
- Ensure that your CV matches your on-line presence e.g. LinkedIn



# CVs for Postgraduate Study



## CAREER ESSENTIALS

CVs for Postgraduate  
Study

CAREERS  
SERVICE



# Personal statements



## CAREER ESSENTIALS

Applications for  
Postgraduate Study:  
Personal Statements

CAREERS  
SERVICE



# Personal statement

*Provide evidence of your:*

- 
- academic ability
  - lab experience
  - research potential
  - critical analysis, independent thinking
  - time and information management
  - written communication
- 
- Use short sentences (25 – 30 words)-clarity and succinctly
  - Possibly use headings to break up your statement and to provide structure
  - Use a factual, causal structure: statement followed by evidence e.g. My plan is to study ‘interesting research topic’. This interest came from my experience.....
  - Avoid cliches: “I have always wanted to study ‘interesting research topic’ “ or “My passion for ‘interesting research topic’ goes back to my childhood.”
  - Avoid generic phrases about the university: “I was inspired by the world-famous teaching staff and first-rate facilities” or “The reputation of Cambridge for scientific research is my chief motivation. “



# Sample Personal Statements (Master's courses)

Word limit for this application: 500 max

**MSC IN SCIENCE AND COMMUNICATION  
IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON**

After three years studying for a Natural Sciences degree, I have come to realise that advances in scientific research require both effective communication and informed policy making if they are to have a meaningful impact on society. For example, Cancer Research UK estimate that 40% of UK cancers could be prevented by lifestyle changes but, in practice, translating this knowledge into positive lifestyle changes in the general public has proved very hard to achieve. Similarly, Professor Dame Sally Davies (Chief Medical Officer for England) has recently focused her attention on reducing alcohol intake but, thus far, has had little success because the public simply aren't listening. This contrasts with her message during the Ebola epidemic, when new travel restrictions and compulsory temperature checks for all passengers arriving from West Africa were accepted with good grace by the public, as there was an understanding of the dangers Ebola posed to the UK. These examples illustrate how science can be communicated either well or badly, and that the long-term success of a scientific intervention can often depend upon an effective communication strategy. I am keen to learn how and why science communication succeeds, with an interest in making my long-term career in scientifically informed global policy.

To date, I have been trained as a traditional laboratory scientist. This has involved me in: writing a 35 page report on my 3rd year lab project, preparing an academic paper for publication, and writing a 'science access' article which was published online on The Company of Biologists' website, 'The Node', and in the British Society for Developmental Biologists' annual newsletter. Outside of the laboratory, I have presented a 5 minute slot on 'engaging science' within my hour-long weekly radio show on Cam FM, and have written articles for the science section of the student newspaper. I have enthusiastically embraced these opportunities during my undergraduate years, as I enjoy the marriage between science and creativity that communicating science requires. Attending the Radio Independents Group event "Good Science: Great Radio" in 2015 further fostered my interest in science on the radio; it was a great source of inspiration and led me to train and to pass a course on the technical skills required to present a solo radio show.

These recent experiences have drawn me to the MSc in Science Communication at Imperial College London. I want to learn about how to communicate effectively over a range of media, and to gain real life experience in the science communication industry. This would enable me to acquire the skills, the confidence, and the experience to enter the field as a professional science communicator. The current long-term focus of my interest is to become involved in the creation of effective policy in the context of both international development and global health.

Summarises in one sentence her motivation for studying this course

Emphasises the communication aspects of her laboratory training and makes good use of extra-curricular experiences to demonstrate genuine enthusiasm

Avoids glib statement of career aims, instead explaining how science communication forms part of a bigger career plan

Shows contextual knowledge and personal insight

**MPHIL IN EUROPEAN LITERATURE & CULTURE  
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE**

The MPhil in European Literature & Culture is especially attractive to me because, as a taught course, it is expressly geared towards providing the core critical and theoretical tools needed for detailed study of particular elements in European literature, and towards their application in a specific research project. It builds directly on the twentieth-century paper that I undertook in my final year: there, I was struck by the consequences of postmodern theory, the self-deconstructing, self-betraying nature of language, and how this decentres our notions of truth. I am fascinated by the application of this theory to gender and sexuality, and the ways that this has problematised our conceptions of sex, gender, and desire. Having looked into constructions of 'femininities' in 1980s German-language women's writing (Christa Wolf's *Cassandra* and *Medea*, Elfriede Jelinek's *The Piano Teacher*), I want to look now at depictions of male identity, both through the eyes of male and female authors, and issues of alternatively gendered roles (e.g. *Lightning out of a Blue Sky*). In the longer term, I intend to pursue a career in academia, in a teaching role, because I believe that it is still critical to teach students how to explore and pressurise so many of our powerful cultural and psychological norms.

The taught framework of the MPhil provides maximum opportunity to develop my academic interests. The core course on Critical Theory provides an overview of, amongst others, the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, feminism, and queer theory – all of which relate directly to my proposed dissertation. Of the optional courses, I intend to take 'Text & Society in Renaissance Europe', which, although less modern, deals none the less with fundamental gender issues (e.g. the *querelle des femmes* and women's writing about the Reformation). I will also study 'Memory & Subjectivity in the German Novel', looking at constructions of narrative using theories from the course (e.g. Freud, gender theory). My course options thus provide a broad-base knowledge which leads into my proposed dissertation: I will question the function of gender as defining a distinctive subjectivity in the work of modernist authors such as Franz Kafka and Thomas Mann. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler suggests that the concept of true, biological sex is a cultural myth, and that repeated gender acts can clash with, as well as affirm, gender identity. Where can similar patterns be seen in the modernist literary canon, so frequently a site of conflicted, fractured psychologies? When biology itself starts to break down, what is left of once-comforting ideals such as the neat binary of man and woman? Where, in other words, is the body in all this rethinking, reshaping, and refiguring?

My undergraduate degree provided solid training in how to go about an individual research project and how to keep sight of the primary text when secondary sources are used. My year-abroad dissertation focused on Martin Luther: not on his theology per se, but on his vernacular translations of the Psalms and on the way that he served, for his followers, as a guarantor and something approaching a co-author of the biblical text. In my optional papers, spanning from the Renaissance all the way to the modern day, I always tried to contextualise my understanding of chosen texts by reading widely in the historical and theoretical background. Moreover, I worked for a few weeks in the Faculty Library at the end of my final year, so I have useful knowledge of the collection and how to access it.

Both in terms of content and structure, the MPhil in European Literature & Culture is the right next step for me, as a bridge from my undergraduate degree towards a PhD that brings German modernism together with contemporary gender theory.

Succinctly sets out reasons for choosing this course, intellectual aims, and career aspirations

Shows detailed knowledge of the course structure and specifies which optional courses he plans to take

Addresses the skills and training he brings to the course

Leaves just enough space for a proper conclusion

# What to expect of 3 – 4 years of PhD study

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## Training in skills to become an independent researcher

- Time-management
- Critical thinking
- Planning experiments
- Research integrity
- Writing papers publish wisely- where and when
- How to select appropriate referees
- Peer review papers
- Teaching/supervising summer, undergraduate, Masters students
- Oral presentations
- Funding applications start small e.g. travel grant
- Recruiting staff
- Managing a research team
- Committee member
- Public engagement
- Networking



# Interview advice

- *Preparation, preparation, preparation!!!* you can never be over-prepared!
- *Know your panel*: look up the research areas of each member, anticipate questions
- *Talk*: stick strictly to the guidance (format, time allocation, etc)
- *Questions*: listen carefully and let the examiner finish the question, then consider and structure your response, if you do not know the answer admit this right away but come up with a suggestion
- *Potential red flags in interviews*: when students do not answer the the following questions well:
  - > Do you enjoy working in a team?
  - > How have you overcome challenges/personal conflict in the past?

# General career advice

- ENGAGING SCIENCE
- TENACITY
- SUPPORTIVE MENTORS
- RICH RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT
- COLLEAGUES
- WORK–LIFE BALANCE

“A Recipe for success”

<https://doi.org/10.1111/imcb.12786>